UNITED
NATIONS

CEDAW

# Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women

Distr.
GENERAL

CEDAW/C/13/Add.30
13 March 1990

ORIGINAL: ENGLISH

Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination
against Women (CEDAW)

CONSIDERATION OF REPORTS SUBMITTED BY STATES PARTIES
UNDER ARTICLE 18 OF THE CONVENTION

Second Periodic Reports of States parties

Addendum

BANGLADESH

V.90-82835

Introduction:

The Goverrment of Bangladesh , as a State party to the Convention , and in compliance with the provisions of Article 18 of the Convention , wishes to present this report on the legislative , administrative and other measures adopted in related to the provisions of Article 16 of the Convention , which within the framework of the current situation in Bangladesh have been taken with regard to the status of Women.

The report consists of the general back ground on the situation of women ,policies and various measures taken by the Government to implement the Convention and progress made to promote and ensure the elimination of discrimination against women.

Women constitute almost half of the total population of Bangladesh. To ensure a balanced socio-economic growth and development of the country , equal participation of women is essential. The Constitution of Bangladesh clearly up holds the principle of equality between men and women and forbids discrimination against women. Inspite of that the Bangladesh Government has undertaken special measures to uplift the condition of women in the field of education , employment , health and family planning.

Between 1974 to 1984 - 85 , Womens labour force participation has grown at a much faster rate ( 10 percent for women as opposed to 2 percent for men ) but with questionable returns. Labour market segmentation and occupational segregation have not substantially broken down. Women generally remain concentrated in insecure , casual female - stereotyped , low-income jobs on average , women earn less than man. Fifty two percent of women compared to only 14 percent of men earn less than Tk./US $ = taka 32.27 a week.

75 a week.

Wage rates for women day labourers are almost half of that of men and women are more adversely affected by seasonal wage variations. Working conditions are generally poor and new areas of employment expansion e.g. garments are vulnerable to market fluctuations. Between 1974 and 1981 female literacy rates improved from 13 percent to 18 percent and though the rate of growth for female literacy was higher , overall womens literacy remain half of that of man. In 1984 - 85 66 percent of females compared to 49 percent of males had no access to education. One fifth of the females and one fourth of the males had education up to class IV. But only 9% of females compared to 18% of males go beyond class V. And only one third of the college - educated population are female. At the post - secondary levels , gender differentials in the humanities and social science have been virtually eliminated while a large gop still exists in agriculture ; engineering , commerce , and other technical and vocational fields.

In Bangladesh , inspite of overall improvements in life expectancy between 1974 and 1985, women's life expectancy has fallen relative to men's and it is lower than men's ( 54 for women and 55 for men ). Moreover inspite of higher male infant mortality, per thousand live birth 113 males to 109 females , the death rate for girl children between the ages of 1 to 4 is higher ( 16 girls per thousand to 13 boys ). Between two nutrition surveys 1975-76 and 1981 - 82 , adult males have increased their caloric intakes while adult females have suffered a decrease.

In community and public life women have become slightly more visible in the last eighteen years. A female quota has ensured womens presence in local bodies and in parliament. In each upazila parishad ( local body ) and municipal council also there are three nominated women members.

However , women like men are not an undifferentiated catagory. Rural women's access to education is only half ( 30% ) of that of urban women ( 64% ) and urban women's chances of continuing up to class X is much greater ( 20% of Urban and 8% of rural girls are retained up to class X ) Life expectancy for rural women is also much lower.

However , some specific and limited programmes were taken up during the later part of the First Five year plan to improve the lot of the women by creating congerial of the Women by creatiny congerial socio-economic atmosphere.

The second and third Five year plans have however given emphasis on more dynamic and diversified programmes to ensure more meaningful participation of women in the development process.

Policies and Measures:

Ministry of Women's Affairs has undertaken activities to ensure conducive atmosphere for women's participation in the socio-economic activities and formulating necessary policies in this respect. Alongwith the Ministry of Women's Affairs other Ministries of the Government , such as Agriculture , Education , Health and population Control , Finance , Local Government and Rural Development etc. are also implementing a large number of special projects on women in line with the principles of the UN Decade for Women.

For overall integration of women in the development process by raising their socio-economic status, the Third Plan has kept in view the following objectives :-

i) to reduce imbalance between the development of mem and women through increased participation of women in income generating activities ;

ii) to motivate women for greater participation in education ( both formal and non-formal ) and skill training ;

iii) to expand credit facilities for women to enable them to become self employed ;

iv) to expand accommodation facilities for job seeking and career women and expansion of community based day care facilities for the children of working women ;

v) to improve leadership and managerial training to women at various level ;

vi) to take measures for moral , physical and cultural development of children ;

vii) to train and rehabilitate socially handicapped deserted women.

In order to achieve the above mentioned objective it was necessary to reduce the educational imbalance between the sexes. In the TFYP priority has been accorded to cater all possible educational needs of women. The Constitution of Bangladesh clearly upholds the principle of equality between men and women and forbids discrimination against women. Article 27 declares that all citizens are equal before law and are entitle to equal protection of law. Article 28 (I) states that the state shall not discriminate against any citizen on grounds of religion , race caste , sex or place of birth.

The Bangladesh Government has launched various multidimensional projects to improve the status and conditions of women. Different multisectoral programmes on education , health and employment have created great awareness amongst women folk. Health for all by 2000 A.D. is the accepted policy of the government and the Government is finaly determined to achieve 1.8 growth rate by 1990. The Government is giving particular attention to the education sector. Establishment of at least one model school for girls in each upazila ( Sub-District ) is the policy of the Government.

In the Second and Third Fiver Year plans , Government has emphasised the importance of socially handicapped and distressed women and especially Women's development as integral part of social development. Government has also set - up career women's hostels ,Mother and Child Care Centre , Agrobased production training centres , a Supreme Council for Mother's and Children and various income generating technical and vocational training projects.

To correct the sex imbalance in education , the Government has taken various pragmatic steps such as reservation of 50% seats for femele teachers at the primary level. Equal wage for equal work is the recognised policy of the Bangladesh Government. The major steps taken in augmenting employment are reservation of 10% of all gazetted posts and 15% of all non-gazetted posts for women in government service , relaxation of age but at recruitment from 27 to 30 years in case of women , lifting of bar to women's entry to civil service , Police and Anned Forces and in other fields. In addition , for increasing the scope of women's self employment extensive programmes for credit, supply of raw materials , marketing facilities and skill training have been under - taken by both Government and non governmental agencies. The number of women in non traditional jobs such as mills , factories , construction works , plantations , garment industries, Phamaceuticals , electronics and other small scale trades and businesses are increasing. The success of Grameen Bank ( Rural Bank ) project is worth mentioning in this respect. Food for Work Programme employs over 60 ,000 women in construction , digging , repair and maintenance work. Recently , there has been a spurt of garment industries largely employing women. Women are also coming up in various non traditional professions such as Law, Architecturae , Engineering etc , in increasing number.

The programmes of the Directorate of Women's Affairs are broadly covered under revenue and development budget. There are 22 districts training-cum-production centres in each of the old 22 districts and 136 upazilas level offices. The Directorate has so far set up 456 training cum-production centres.

It is proposed to set up 22 Career Women's Hostel in the old district head quarters. Out of which 5 hostels have already been set up.

The Government has been using law as an important instrument to effect improvement in the status and condition of women in our society. It has ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. Our Constitution and domestic laws ensure equal opportunity to all citizens regardless of their sex or race or religion. Our Constitution makes special provisions for less backward developed people , which include women , with the objectives of improving the position of women at all levels.

The Government of Bangladesh has enacted and amended various necessary laws. These are in conformity with the provision of the U.N. Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and U.N. Decade of Women.

The Government of Bangladesh has made and amended various laws to improve status of women and to stop violence , deprivation and illegal trafficking against women. The following are the most remarkable legislative measures taken by the Government in Bangladesh.

Child Marriage Restraint ( Amendment ) Ordinance , 1984 :-

The Ordinance has ammended child marriage Restraint Act , 1929 raising the marriageable age of females from 16 to 18 years and males from 18 to 21 years. Section 4 provides for punishment for male adult about twenty one years of age for marrying a female child i.e. who is below 18 years of age and a female adult for marrying a male child , who is below 21 years of age.

Cruelty to women ( Deterrent Punishment ) Ordinance 1983 :-

Section 4 of the Act. has made it a punishable offence to kidnap or abduct a women of any age for the purpose. That such women shall be employed for the purpose of prostitution or for any unlawful or immoral purpose. Section 5 has provided that whoever imports , exports , sells , lets , hires , or otherwise disposes of or obtains prossession of any women of any age with intent that such women shall be employed or used for the purpose of prostitution of for any unlawful and immoral purpose , to be punished with transportation for life or with imprisonment which may extend to fourteen years and shall also be liable to fine. The law has further been ammended in 1988 and more serious punishment has been approved for offences under this category.

Amongest other , section 6 has also provided for capital punishment for a husband or his relatives for causing death or attempt to cause death or grievious hurt to the wife for dowry. Causing death in committing rape is also punishable by death or transportation for life and also with fine.

The Family courts ordinance , 1985 :-

The establishment of Family Court is an epoch making step in the country's history. The Family Court shall try cases relating to marriage , divorce , restitution of conjugal rights , dower , maintenance , guardianship and custody of children. This ordinance provides for speedy disposed of cases at a much lesser expense which would benefit women particularly the rural poor women. Provision are there for pretrial reconciliation between the parties and trial in camera in cases where required.

There are other lawes , some of them are :-

The pennal code , Dowry prohibition Act , 1980 , Marriage and Divorce Registration Ordinance, 1974 , The Dowry Prohibition Ordinance ( Amendment ) 1986 , The Muslim Family Law ( Amendment ) Ordinance 1986.

To ensure that justice reaches to the remotest corner and to the oppressed women group the government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh has recently set up a high powered advisory Council for prevention of oppression to women under the Chairmanship of the First Lady Begum Rowshan Ershad , with senior Cabinet members and top bureaucrats as members of the Council. The Director of Women's Affairs was designated as the Secretary of the Council.

The Committee undertook the responsibility of Co-ordinating various projects and programmes relating to prevention of oppression to women and recommend necessary measures to reduce oppression cases to the optimum level.

Under the guidence of the Supreme Council , districts , sub-districts and union level committees have been formed , to deal with the specific cases of violance , oppression , deprivation , discrimination as well as other offences where women and children are considered to be the victims. The district level committees are headed by the District Commissioner as chairman. Other members are Police Superintendent , Civil Surgeon , Public Prosecutor , representative from the Bar Council , a representative from Jatiyo Mohila Sangstha. The district women's Affairs Officer/ district Social Welfare officers were entrusted with the responsibility to act as a member secretary of the committee. They will also undertake anti dowry campaign activities to make it a national movement. The committee was also given the responsibility to consolidate the report of the various cases of violence , discrimination and trafficking of women and report it to the Supreme Council through Women's Affairs Directorate. Assigning the above stated functions similar committee has been formed with Upazila level with the Upazilla Nirbahi Officer as Chairman and Women's Affairs Officer in absence of Women's Affairs Officer Social Welfare Officer as the Secretary of the Committee.

To extend the services in the nooks and corner of the country with the instruction of the Supreme Council such committees were formed also at the union level with the Union Parishad Chairman as Chair person. The three female members of the Union Parishad representing three different wards an included as members of the union level committee. The committee is also represented by the Head Master / Mistress of the Secondary Schools , family Welfare worker of the union. The Union Parishad Secretary is designated as the secretary of the committee .

The main terms of reference of the Committee include , resolving the local level complains on oppression of women , meet at least twice a month to discuss about this acute social problem , create and mobilise social awareness to prevent such incidences and compile and consolidate report for onward transmission to the upazilla level offices.

The Supreme Council also made several important decisions to uphold Women's interest , and to upgrade women's status in the society. To this extent , decision has been taken to reserve 50% post of the primary school teacher for Women , and also to ensure their entrance in this job market. Entrance of male teachers in the primary school was frozen untill the female quota is fulfilled. To facilitate Women's entrance as primary school teacher to local level educated . Women are to be given preference and also the post was declared as non-transferable one unless it is voluntarily asked for.

The Supreme Council also considered that to protect interest at the family level all the marriages should be registered as such the Council has advised the current system of marriage registration should be reviewed and necessary steps must be undertaken so that all marriages are registered properly. To this extent , the concerned Ministry will recruit marriage registerer at the union level. The Council also advised that the marriage registration fee should be fixed at the minimum level so that the poor village people can also get the benefit of registration.

The Supreme Council also appreciated that in order to enhance the status of Women they must be given opportunity for income earning , accordingly the Council advised massive skill development training followed by credit facilities should be ensured for women especially rural women. Accordingly the development oriented ministries were asked to under take specific activities at union level so that women can get access to skill development and income generation activities.

Various legal amendments , existing laws for protection of interest of women , in frastructural facilities created to facilitate women's income earning activities should be made known to women throughout the country. As such it was advised that the national mass media should be widely used to dessiminate such information.

The protect women against the violence mainly created by husband , for second marriage without the permission of first wife ; the Council has advised to examine the current law and make necessary amendment so that attempt to second marriage can be considered as cognigible offence so that legal action can be initiated in such cases.

Finally , the Council also felt it necessary to examine the current laws for protection of women's rights and interest should be throughly reviewed. Accordingly a committee was constituted by the Directorate of Women's Affairs with women lawyers. This committee has recently examined all relevant laws and recommended certain changes and modification to uphold women's rights and interest. These recommendations are now being examined by the Government and in due time it will be placed to the Suprem Council for consideration and approval.

Inspite of the various preventive measure that has been undertaken to uphold Women's interest there are cases where women were bound to undertake immoral occupation like prostitution for their livelihood due to poverty and unemployment. The Government is committed to rehabilitate such women through institutional correctional measures. As such a new project: namely Rowshan Ershad Training and Rehabilitation Centre are now being set up in

Mymensingh for Rehabilitation of such speially handicapped women. The centre will have 500 seats to accommodate 500 socially handicapped women. These women will be given specific skill training along with nonformal education , religious and physical education. They , will be given formal education atleast upto class V so that they become cappble of reading and writing. Free lodging and shelter will be provided for two years. On completion of training they will be given some credit money so that by using the credit money they become self- employed. The project is an innovative one. After gaining adequate experience in such pilot programme similar centres will be established in other parts of the country.

Besides , the above activities , various skill development training and income generation activities have been organised at the upazilla and union level , both through the revenue and development programmes implemented by the Women's Affairs Ministry and other Ministries. The NGOs are also playing supplementary role in this development process. With this intensive effort of the Government of Bangladesh , it is hoped that the situation of women will improve in the coming future and women will be ableto play a vital role to build up a prosperous Bangladesh.